

NSC BRIEFING

17 March 1959

MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS

- I. In Iraq, the Qasim regime appears to have restored order in the Mosul area; major problem has not been the rebel force (dispersed or captured a week ago), but looting by tribesmen and revenge killing by anti-rebel elements, including the ubiquitous Communist-controlled Popular Resistance Force. In fact, the regular authorities in Mosul appealed several times for a curb of the PRF.
- A. In the wake of the revolt, pro-UAR "nationalists" and other anti-Communists seem thoroughly intimidated; assassination of Qasim is for the time being their only hope.

- B. Nasir, however, is continuing a full-scale propaganda war against Qasim, and has pulled out all stops in epithets and specific accusations that Qasim is a Communist tool who will inevitably be overthrown by true Arab nationalists.
1. In private, UAR top officials indicate they feel there is little they can do about Qasim at the moment. Their more pessimistic estimate is that it may be more than a year before another movement can be organized.

3. In addition, there are persistent rumors that Iraqi Communists teams have been sent to assassinate Nasir.

C. Iraq's relations with the USSR meanwhile continue to develop. An agreement signed in Moscow on 16 March provides for a 137 million dollar Soviet loan at 2.5 percent, plus Soviet technical assistance for various light industry projects and studies in irrigation, transportation, and development of mineral resources (could mean oil). This is in addition to an arms deal, [redacted] made last fall.

1. Signature of the economic agreement was occasion for Khrushchev speech in which Soviet leader clearly supported Iraq against the UAR, although pledging "non-interference" in affairs of both countries.
2. Pravda, possibly foreshadowing Soviet efforts to build up Qasim as a counterweight to Nasir, declared on 13 March that "Baghdad is more and more becoming an important center of the liberation movement in the Near and Middle East."

II. Nasir's relations with the USSR, as a result of the latest developments, are again becoming a matter for apprehension in the eyes of the UAR government.

A. The possibility that the USSR may cut off aid or reduce its programs for the UAR is obviously worrying people like Kaissouni, the UAR finance minister, who now seems to be looking rather desperately for signs that the US will come to Nasir's rescue. Interior Minister Zarakria Muhi al-Din has also said now is the time for the US to take the initiative and make an offer.

- B. Nasir in his speeches has expressed determination to press the anti-Communist campaign regardless of the cost. Although Nasir still makes clear that he wants good relations with the Soviet Union, he evidently does not really believe that he can have them as long as he persists in his present course.
- C. Khrushchev has charged that Nasir has used the "language of imperialists" and sought to unite Iraq with the UAR against the will of the Iraqi people and warned that the anti-Communist campaign will "inevitably fail." Nasir quickly replied that Khrushchev had distorted the facts and that the Soviet leader's defense of Arab Communists is "a matter which the Arab people cannot accept."
- D. Khrushchev and Nasir seem to have laid down a set of incompatible qualifications to their stated willingness to continue their relations on previous basis. One will have to give way or further deterioration seems inevitable.

III. Nasir, frustrated in Iraq and in trouble with the Soviet Union, may possibly seek to operate in other areas to show he is still the real "only leader" of the Arabs. In addition to Kuwait, which was mentioned last week, such areas include:

- A. Sudan, where the political-military pot is still bubbling.

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- B. Libya, where persistent elements of instability remain and where we still have large stake in air base.

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- C. Yemen, where however Ambassador Hare is having some success in impressing [redacted] Imam.

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1. The Imam now seems willing to accept US help in road improvement and agriculture; this might counterbalance the efforts of Crown Prince Badr to bring about extensive dependence on Sino-Soviet aid.

IV. Both Jordan's King Husayn and Prime Minister Rifai are now enroute to Washington, and will arrive next week. Rifai brings with him what he feels are especially galling budgetary problems and hopes that the United States will decide that Jordan is an irreplaceable bastion of the free world and therefore deserves at least fifty million dollars in aid this coming fiscal year.

- A. Meanwhile, back in Amman, the government claims to have uncovered still another plot against the monarchy, and a number of army officers are reported to have been arrested.

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- C. Most depressing development from Husayn's standpoint is sudden emergence of Nasir as the area's most strident anti-Communist;

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- V. Meanwhile, Soviet-Iranian tension increased during the past week.
- A. There has been an increasing series of charges and counter-charges.
1. Ambassador Pegov is returning to Moscow amid speculation that he will not return to Tehran.
 2. Departure of Iranian ambassador-designate to Moscow has been postponed "until such time as relations improved."
 3. Soviet radio propaganda has renewed explicit personal attacks on Shah.
 4. Iran, in turn, by press and radio is seeking to counteract Soviet propaganda by charging Khrushchev with return to the era of Stalin and Moscow with attitude that anyone "who is not Moscow's flunky is its enemy."
 5. Tehran has also alleged 81 violations of Iranian air space by Soviet planes during recent months; and Moscow has charged that Iran has massed troops on Iraqi border. Neither charge is substantiated.
 6. Moscow has also termed Iran's efforts to "annul" clauses (5 and 6) of the Soviet-Iranian treaty of 1921 as "clumsy attempts"...to escape treaty obligations. Pravda has asserted that USSR intends "to hold to a...pact with Iran enabling Russia to send troops into the...country if aggression threatens the Soviet Union."
- B. The Soviet political warfare moves involved probably foreshadow tougher Soviet tactics designed to topple the Shah's regime.

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